



## **TENANCY SUSTAINMENT POLICY 2022**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Tenancy Sustainment is a generic term for the prevention of tenancy breakdown or a 'failed tenancy'. Failed tenancies are a waste of resources because each additional property becoming empty incurs significant costs. It can also have negative effects for the tenant who may become homeless or find it difficult to secure another tenancy because of issues relating to their former, failed tenancy.

1.2 We consider that a tenancy has not been sustained if it ends within 12 months and we use the definition set out by the Scottish Housing Regulator in ARC Indicator 16 (Percentage of new tenancies sustained for more than a year) to assess our effectiveness in this area. However, they are particularly concerned to prevent tenancies ending by: -

- ✓ Eviction – at any time
- ✓ Abandonment – at any time
- ✓ Early termination (a tenancy which lasts under 12 months)

We recognise that there may be other less obvious reasons why people give up their tenancies such as domestic abuse and other forms of harassment. We also recognise that people may terminate their tenancy early for positive reasons such as purchasing a home, finding a new job or moving in with their partner.

1.3 The cost of a failed tenancy is high for both the tenant and the Association. Every failed tenancy represents:

- ✓ Abortive resource commitments
- ✓ Rent loss during the time property is empty
- ✓ Costs incurred associated with the re-letting of a property

In some cases:

- ✓ Legal Expenses
- ✓ Costs incurred by other agencies or authorities who subsequently take responsibility for accommodating the former tenant
- ✓ The cost to the person who again finds themselves in need of accommodation and may now have additional issues to overcome, such as former tenancy debt or rechargeable repairs

1.4 There are known risk factors in relation to early tenancy failure, and particular household types may need help or assistance in sustaining their tenancies. The following list is not exhaustive:

- ✓ Mental health issues

- ✓ Learning difficulties
- ✓ Drug and alcohol addiction problems
- ✓ Disabilities
- ✓ Leaving care
- ✓ Domestic violence
- ✓ Poverty & fuel poverty
- ✓ Being under 25 or in a first tenancy
- ✓ Young parents
- ✓ People with support needs
- ✓ No established local networks
- ✓ History of homelessness
- ✓ History of rent arrears, abandonment or antisocial behaviour in a previous tenancy
- ✓ Previously failed tenancy or eviction

1.5 Other causes of tenancy breakdown are:

- ✓ Allocations in unwanted areas
- ✓ Dissatisfaction with property condition
- ✓ Antisocial behaviour
- ✓ Debt problems
- ✓ Inability to secure adequate furniture and equipment
- ✓ Lack of support with resettlement and setting up home Isolation
- ✓ Insufficient information sharing and partnership working

1.6 Tenancy sustainment is not a new concept for Ochil View, and our staff are experienced in assisting tenants to sustain their tenancies and preventing homelessness. This policy recognises that it is not currently our role to carry out detailed assessment of needs or to case manage tenants with specific needs, but that we must be proactive in signposting and referring tenants to both external agencies and our Tenancy Sustainment Staff who have the expertise to assist.

## **2.0 LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

2.1 The Scottish Social Housing Charter sets out the results that tenants and other customers should expect social landlords to achieve. It covers housing activities only and details 16 Outcomes and Standards. We comply with all relevant Outcomes including Outcome 11 'Tenancy Sustainment' which states:

*'Social landlords must ensure that tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations'*

## **3.0 AIMS & OBJECTIVES**

3.1 It is a Strategic Objective of Ochil View to provide a comprehensive and responsive customer service to tenants, sharing and factored owners which supports sustainable tenancies and delivers customer satisfaction

This Strategic Objective is further supported by a number of related Departmental Objectives:

- ✓ To provide services so that every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, and is treated fairly and with respect, with fair access to housing and housing services (CS1);
- ✓ To ensure that tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with us and get the information they need about us including how and why we make decisions and the services we provide (CS2);
- ✓ To provide a range of quality housing management services to tenants and other customers and to provide and assist tenants to access services which enable tenants to sustain their tenancies and live independently in their homes (HS1)
- ✓ To work with other landlords to provide information and services to current tenants looking to move and housing applicants including homeless people to make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them (HS2)
- ✓ To work with local authorities to ensure that the risk of homelessness is minimised (HS3)

3.2 By implementing a Tenancy Sustainment Policy, we seek to prevent tenancy failure and homelessness by:

Prevention

Taking steps prior to and from the commencement of a tenancy which will identify issues and assist in sustainment.

Tenancy Support

Being proactive in identifying prospective and existing tenant vulnerability issues and ensuring the appropriate support is put in place to sustain a tenancy.

Partnership Working

Developing networks and partnership working with other agencies to address vulnerabilities and assist in sustaining tenancies.

**4.0 TENANCY SUSTAINMENT IN PRACTICE**

4.1 Prevention

We operate a choice based lettings system which reduces the risk of applicants accepting an inappropriate tenancy through offers of property being made that the applicant does not want, but then may feel pressured to accept. We aim to identify support needs at the point of registration and at the pre- tenancy interview, and to ensure that, wherever possible, any appropriate support is in place at the start of the tenancy.

We carry out accompanied viewings to all of our empty properties. This provides an opportunity to explain the characteristics of the property and the local area, and for the prospective tenant to raise any concerns or issues. It also provides another opportunity to ensure that any support needs are identified and addressed to allow the tenant to move in and be able to live in the property.

All of our empty homes must meet our Lettable Standard when they are relet. We provide assistance with decoration costs where the standard of decoration is poor at the beginning of a tenancy.

We aim to ensure that our new tenants fully understand their tenancy obligations at the time of signing their agreement and highlight some of our key housing management policies which emphasise early intervention and prevention and adopt a customer centred approach.

All new tenants are offered an appointment with the Tenancy Sustainment Team at the beginning of tenancy. The Tenancy Sustainment Team also carry out follow up calls offering an appointment or assistance in the first year of every tenancy. These are carried out at 3 months, 6 months, 9 months and 11 months after the tenancy begins.

New tenants that are not transfers are contacted by the Housing Services Officer within 6 weeks of taking up occupancy. If the Housing Services Officer feels that it is necessary to visit then this will be arranged for example if the tenant is vulnerable and requires support however, where possible the contact will be carried out remotely. This enables early identification of any problems and gives the new tenant an opportunity to raise any issues they may wish clarified. The Association aims to contact 100% of all New Tenants who are not transfers, however priority will be given to:

- those in their first tenancy,
- those who are under 25, receiving support or are vulnerable,
- tenants who are formerly homeless, with a history of arrears or anti-social behaviour

Housing Services Officers should refer tenants in arrears for interview by the Tenancy Sustainment Officer when arrears arise and at any point where they feel that a significant change of circumstances has occurred.

We ensure that all information provided to applicants and tenants is in plain English, easy to understand and in a format suited to each individual. Our newsletters include regular information about support agencies and services in our area of operations.

We provide a Tenancy Sustainment Service for our tenants and will ensure maximum take up of benefits wherever possible.

Our Rent Arrears policy emphasises the importance of arrears prevention and encouraging tenants to seek help before debt becomes unmanageable. Eviction is always a last resort.

#### 4.2 Tenancy Support

We provide a Tenancy Sustainment Service to assist new and existing tenants to successfully remain in their tenancies.

We do not provide an independent Money Advice Service. Instead, our Tenancy Sustainment staff can signpost all our tenants to Clackmannanshire Citizens Advice Bureau for specialist Money and Debt Advice. Our Tenancy Sustainment Team can assist tenants with a wide range of information, support and advice in confidence; and can help with budgeting, benefits, energy efficiency and grants & loans.

We will ensure that, wherever possible that the required support is in place at the start of a new tenancy and if we cannot help, we will refer tenants to the appropriate support provider as issues are identified. For example, we may make referrals to the following agencies if required: -

**Furniture**

**Clackmannanshire** – ACE Furniture Recycling Centre and The Valley

**Fife** – Castle and Furniture Plus

**Fuel Advice**

**Clackmannanshire** – Home Energy Scotland

**Fife** – Cosy Kingdom

**Money Advice & Debt Management**

**Clackmannanshire** – Clackmannanshire Citizens Advice

**Fife** – Citizens Advice & Rights Fife

**Food Parcels**

**Clackmannanshire** – The Gate, Soup Kitchen and starter packs

**Fife** – Citizens Advice & Rights Fife and starter packs

**Families with Young Children**

Homestart for all areas

**Dependency Issues**

Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon and Signpost all areas

Forth Valley Family Support Service for Clackmannanshire

**Domestic Violence**

Womens Aid

4.3 **Partnership Working**

We work in partnership with a range of organisations skilled to provide the appropriate support to our tenants and this includes the agencies set out above and

Clackmannanshire Council

Fife Council

We participate in various Welfare Reform Working Groups in Clackmannanshire and West Fife to ensure, as far as reasonably possible, the smooth transition to a new Benefit System.

**5.0 STAFF TRAINING**

We will ensure that appropriate staff are trained to identify potentially vulnerable households.

**6.0 PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

6.1 We carry out post allocation/exchange satisfaction surveys to gauge levels of satisfaction with our services and identify any areas where tenants feel we could

do better. Exit interviews, when tenants decide to end their tenancy, are another valuable source of information. The information gathered is used to identify where we may need to improve our services to applicants and tenants.

## 7.0 **POLICY REVIEW**

This policy will be subject to review at least every 5 years.

**March 2022**

### Policy Review Consultation Process

Policy Considered by Senior Management Team	
Policy Recommended by Customer Services Committee	14 <sup>th</sup> April 2022
<b>APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>28<sup>th</sup> April 2022</b>
<b>Date of Next Review</b>	<b>April 2027</b>

Approved